

IN THE history of the exposition of Scripture, few texts have caused as many problems as Genesis 6:1-4. This passage has been the delight of novices and the despair of theologians. The text reads as follows:

And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose. And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years. There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old; men of renown.

Since these verses form a part of the inspired Word, any attempt to understand them meets with God's approval and is well worth the effort. It will not do, as some have done, to simply write this off as an inscrutable account "of unknown origin and uncertain purpose."¹ God had a definite purpose in disclosing this problematic event. It is the believer's duty to try and understand it.

The Problems That Are Involved

The Identification of the Persons Involved. The proper interpretation of the passage revolves around the identification of the "sons of God" and the "daughters of men." An impressive array of scholars has suggested that the "sons of God" were simply men of the godly line of Seth who intermarried with the "daughters of men," that is, women of the ungodly line of Cain. An equally imposing list of scholars has marshalled evidence that the "sons of God" are to be understood as fallen angels who cohabited with women of the human race. Both these views, however, are beset with seemingly insurmountable difficulties.

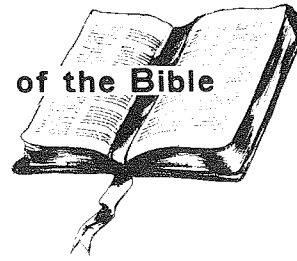
Identification of the Promiscuity Involved. If the "sons of God" are angelic beings, their sin is one of perversion. Two worlds, the angelic and the human, are mixed through a most heinous sin. On the other hand, if the "sons of God" are the Sethites, their sin is one of pollution of the godly line. It is an indiscriminate marriage without regard to spiritual status.

Identification of the Progeny Involved. Some see the "giants" (*nephilim*) who were "in the earth in those days" as men of great stature or heroes

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Difficult Passages of the Bible



The Sons of God and the Daughters of Men

By Manfred E. Kober

who were living at that time or were the product of the intermarriage of the two religious communities. Others see the *nephilim* as the unnatural offspring of fallen angels and mortal women.

The "men of renown" (*gibborim*) of verse 4 are either seen as a reference to the offspring of the union of the "sons of God" and "daughters of men" or they are considered as explanatory of the *nephilim*. The "men of renown" would therefore be identical with the *nephilim*.

The Proposals That Have Been Offered

Angelic Creatures. According to this view, fallen angels assume human form, seduce mortal women and produce an offspring of giants or monsters. As a result of this Satanically inspired attempt to corrupt the human race and thus the Messianic line, God was forced to send the universal deluge preserving only righteous Noah and his family.

Proponents for the "angel theory" point first of all to the antiquity of the view. Probably the oldest written reference to this theory is found in the pseudepigraphal (i.e., written under an assumed name) Book of Enoch around 200 B.C. This book says that two hundred angels in Heaven saw the beautiful women on earth, lusted after them and took them for wives with the result that they became pregnant and bore

A suggested interpretation of a much-debated subject.

giants. For the first time sinning angels are associated with Genesis 6. Furthermore, this view seems to have been the common Jewish interpretation. The famous Jewish historian Josephus (born 37 B.C.) wrote: "Many angels accompanied with women, and begat sons that proved unjust" (*Antiquities*, 1:3:1). Likewise, the common Bible of the Jews at the time of Christ, the Septuagint version of the Hebrew Scripture in the Greek language (third century B.C.), reads in Genesis 6:2 "angels of God" instead of "sons of God."

Advocates of the angelic view point out that the Hebrew term rendered "sons of God" in the English Bible is used exclusively of angels in the Old Testament. The term "sons of God" occurs three times in that sense in Job (1:6; 2:1; 38:7). A similar phrase,

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"sons of God" or "sons of the mighty," in Psalms 29:1 and 89:6 is usually interpreted to refer to angels also. Daniel 3:25, which speaks of "a son of the gods," is also sometimes cited in support.

Then, too, the early church held the position that angels are referred to in Genesis 6 and understood the New Testament passages of 1 Peter 3:18-20, 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 as references to an angelic sin of Genesis 6. Coder observed: "There was something strange and terrible in those ancient unions, because their progeny were monstrous. This is a fact difficult to explain if the text refers merely to godly men taking ungodly wives."²

Moreover, it has also been pointed out that references in ancient mythology to intermarriage between gods and men must have their ultimate origin in a historical event. Unger, who argues cogently for the angel view, notes:

One thing is certain, ancient classic writers obtained their conceptions of the gods and demigods, whose amorous propensities for members of the human race led to births half human and half divine, from some source originally pure and uncorrupted. It is not impossible that this might explain the origin.³

Finally, it is also contended that this view best explains the progeny of the union of Genesis 6, namely "giants" and "men of renown." This unnatural union produced an unnatural race of monstrosities which had to be destroyed by the Flood. This view also holds that the sons of Anak (Num. 13:33, the only other place the word "giant" occurs) could also refer to another intrusion of fallen angels into the human realm.

Even those who advocate this view admit that it is "vexed by serious questions."⁴ The chief objection usually stated is that the concept of sexual activity involving angels is foreign to the Bible. Nowhere else in the context of Genesis 6 are angels mentioned; nowhere else in Scripture is there an analogy for the idea of intermarriage of angels and men; and Christ specifically stated that angels do not marry (Matt. 22:30; Mark 12:25; Luke 20:34-36). However, advocates of the angel view point out that Christ is speaking of good angels and that man does not possess a full knowledge of fallen angels.

The appeal to the Septuagint reading of "angels of God" should be tempered with an acknowledgment that it is only the Alexandrian manuscript which so reads. The critical Septuagint text by Rahlfs does read "sons of God" and therefore does *not* reflect an ancient "angelic" understanding of Genesis 6.

Opponents to the angelic view ask: Why should judgment fall upon those

who were tempted? Why are only the humans judged and punished in the Genesis account? If the evil angels were the initiators of the sin, then God should have dealt firmly with them as He did with the serpent in Genesis 3. After all, it was the "sons of God" who initiated the sin. Yet nothing is mentioned of judgment on the angels anywhere in the context of Genesis 6.

Some would appeal to 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 to support a judgment on these angels. Yet in these two passages nothing is said of angelic marriages. To argue that the "in like manner" of Jude 7 equates the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah with that of the angels of Genesis 6 is saying too much, for sodomy is not the same as marrying wives, which is what happened in Genesis 6:2. The phrase in Genesis 6:2, "took them wives," means to marry in a formal way and does not carry the connotation of incestuous cohabitation. Besides, the Jude passage simply means that the people of Sodom and Gomorrah are a warning example "in like manner" as the angels.

The punctuation of the Authorized Version has much in its favor: "Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over . . ." C. Fred Lincoln elaborates on this interpretation:

The phrase "in like manner" of Jude 7 does not compare the sin of the angels with that of the men of Sodom and Gomorrah, but says that the cities about Sodom and Gomorrah (*i.e.*, Admah and Zeboim, Deut. 29:23 and Hos. 11:8) "in like manner" with the other two, Sodom and Gomorrah, committed this sin of lasciviousness.⁵

The sin of the angels (v. 6) and the sin of the cities (v. 7) are held up as warning examples of heinous sins resulting in eternal judgments.

The angel theory confuses the prehistoric fall of angels, mentioned in Jude 6, with the sin of Genesis 6. "The angels which kept not their first estate" are now in permanent torment. What was their first estate? Unconfirmed creaturely holiness. This they lost by rebelling against God's authority. Apparently the ringleaders are now in chains. Only Satan, the archenemy of God, is still temporarily free.

In a similar fashion, 2 Peter 2 gives three examples of divine judgment of the wicked: first, "the angels that sinned" (v. 4); second, the pre-Flood era (v. 5); third, Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 6). J. Sidlow Baxter notes concerning this passage:

Now if, as the angel-theory advocates say, number 1 happened at the same time as number 2, why not 2 at the same time as 3? Is it not the more reasonable thing to see that Peter here speaks in correct

order of three events which occurred successively and not simultaneously? It is; and that means, of course, that this fall of angels happened before Noah's time.⁶

It is very interesting to notice, but frequently ignored, that the marriage among the sons of God and daughters of men in Genesis 6 is referred to in Matthew 24:37-39 and Luke 17:26-29 as a sign of ungodliness and wickedness of the human race at the time of the Lord's coming. The corruption of mankind will be similar to that of the time of the Flood ("But as the days of Noah . . . marrying and giving in marriage, . . . so shall also the coming of the Son of man be"). If, then, the sin of Genesis 6 is an intermarriage of evil angels and human women, it follows that such a demonic invasion must again take place.

"Sons of God" is said to refer always to angelic beings elsewhere. Actually, the phrase occurs only in Job 1:6, 2:1 and 38:7. Similar phrases are found in Psalm 89:6, Daniel 3:25 and Psalm 29:1. In every one of these passages, however, it is used only of *unfallen* creatures and used in a general way to specify those voluntarily submissive to the will of God. To call a fallen creature a son of God would be pointless (cf. John 8:44, "ye are of your father the devil"). It is true that Satan is mentioned in the first two Job passages; nevertheless, it must be noted that in both passages he is presented as an intruder, and appears to be distinguished from the sons of God (" . . . the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them").

One might also wonder why Moses did not say "angels" if this is what was meant here. Surely it was a part of his vocabulary. No less than fifteen times in the Pentateuch does he refer to angels, and they are always called angels, never once called "sons of God."

The angel view assumes that these creatures left one habitation and came to earth for a specific purpose. Baxter, who probably gives the best refutation of the angel view, writes:

There is not a single word or even the faintest hint that these "sons of God" somehow *came* to the earth for the purpose, much less is there the slightest suggestion that they were [fallen] angels committing a staggering monstrosity. Surely had the latter been so, the writer would at the very least have said that they "came" or "descended" or "appeared," instead of simply "saw" and "took"!⁷

Not only do the terminology and context of Genesis 6 seem to militate against the possibility of any reference to angelic creatures, there is one other difficulty which makes the angel theory untenable. Whatever the "giants" and

"men of renown" might have been, they were not the product of an unholy union between angels and women. From a psychophysiological viewpoint, a cohabiting of angelic creatures with human women is unthinkable. And yet if such a sexual union did take place it could have occurred, as the great commentator Keil so aptly discerns, in only three possible ways. Angels could produce offspring because (1) either by nature they possess material bodies; or (2) they have intrinsic rebellious power to create for themselves material bodies; or (3) they are capable of procreating without natural bodies.⁸ All three ideas are utterly impossible and Lincoln's statement is much to the point:

Though angels were at times made visible to chosen men, such occurrences were under God's direct supervision and limitations. What became of those bodies, if they were temporary physical or material abodes, is not revealed in Scripture. The Angel of Jehovah, though He appeared to men in Old Testament times in a form visible to men, had to be born of a virgin in order to have a normal body "prepared for Him" (Heb. 10:5).⁹

What do the advocates of the angel view say to these objections? They try to dismiss them by simply asserting: "To deny such a possibility [of angels crossbreeding with human beings] is to assume, it would seem, a degree of knowledge of fallen angelic nature which man does not possess."¹⁰ Actually, it is the angel proponents who demonstrate a more intimate knowledge of angelic nature than the Bible would warrant. The Bible appears to be clear enough on the nature of angels. Baxter addresses himself at length to the psychological and physiological difficulties

involved in such a union and states:

Let us be frank and explicit. The angels are bodiless, purely spiritual beings, and sexless. Being bodiless and sexless means that they are without sex organs, and that they are therefore absolutely incapable of sensuous experiences or sexual processes; nor are they capable of procreation or reproduction in any way whatever. There is no need to refer to this or that or the other text: the whole teaching of the Bible concerning the angels stands solidly behind that affirmation.

As for the suggestion that these evil angels somehow took human bodies to themselves and thus became capable of sex functions, it is sheer absurdity, as anyone can see. Both on psychological and physiological ground it is unthinkable. We all know what an exquisitely delicate, intricate, intimate, sensitive inter-relation and inter-reaction there exists between the human body and the human mind or soul. This is because soul and body came into being together through the wonderful process of a human birth, and are mysteriously united in one human personality. Thus, and only thus, is it that the sensations of the body become experiences of the mind. This psychophysical parallelism of the human personality is a mystery; but it is an absolute and universal reality.

Now if angels merely took bodies and miraculously indwelt them for the time being, their doing so could not have made them in the slightest degree able to experience the sensations of those bodies, even if those bodies themselves could have been capable of real sensations, which is greatly doubtful; for the angels and those temporarily occupied bodies, not having come into being together by a real human birth as one personality, there could not be any such inter-reaction as that which exists in the case of the human mind and body. Indeed, the bodies could not have been real bodies of flesh and blood at all, when we come to think of it; for without being in-

habited by the human spirit, the human flesh-and-blood body dies. Bodies occupied by angels simply could not be normal human bodies of flesh and blood.¹¹

Finally, what can be said concerning extra-Biblical traditions of intermarriage between celestial and terrestrial beings? Do they not rest on some historical basis? And did not the events of Genesis 6 give origin to these grotesque myths? For one thing, "extra-canonical considerations may never be pitted against the evidence which Scripture itself determinatively provides."¹² It should be emphasized, as Green has done, that "the whole conception of sexual life, as connected with God or angels, is absolutely foreign to Hebrew thought."¹³ Green points out that there is no Hebrew word for goddess, that the idea of deities having sexual functions is rejected as a heathen notion in the Bible and that there is no analogy in the Bible for the idea of intermarriage of angels and men.

(continued next month)

¹G. Henton Davies, *Genesis: The Broadman Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1969), p. 149.

²S. Maxwell Coder, *Jude: The Acts of the Apostles* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958), p. 38.

³Merrill F. Unger, *Biblical Demonology* (Wheaton: Scripture Press, 1952), p. 49.

⁴Unger, p. 50.

⁵C. Fred Lincoln, "Covenant, Dispensational and Related Studies" (unpublished manuscript, Dallas Theological Seminary), p. 42.

⁶J. Sidlow Baxter, *Studies in Problem Texts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960), p. 164.

⁷Baxter, p. 174.

⁸C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, Vol. 1: *The Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1965), pp. 132-33.

⁹Lincoln, p. 40.

¹⁰Unger, p. 50.

¹¹Baxter, p. 152.

¹²John Murray, *Principles of Conduct* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1957), p. 244.

¹³William Henry Green, cited by Leroy Birney, "An Exegetical Study of Genesis 6:1-4," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Vol. XIII, Winter 1970, p. 45.

*** IMPORTANT**

Annual Conference Information



An Ocean Grove official has called attention to the fact that many people are sending reservations for rooms but no money. A deposit is required to hold the reservation. If you have not sent a deposit, you do not have a reservation.

Also concerning accommodations, the Hotel Berkeley-Carteret in Asbury Park (not previously listed) is making as many rooms as possible available for conference attendants. The hotel is located within walking distance of Ocean Grove. Write directly for reservations. Rates: Double—\$16, \$20, \$24 or \$28 per day plus 5% New Jersey state sales tax; single—\$14, \$16, \$18 or \$20 per day plus 5% New Jersey state sales tax; third or fourth person in double room—\$5 per person; no charge for children under 12 in the same room with parents.

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